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NSC BRIEFING

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When Stalin died, it was our best guess that his successor, Malenkov, or the triumvirate of Malenkov, Beria and Molotov would initially play a waiting and cautious game - sensitive to any move by the free world to probe the possible weaknesses of the new regime.

We felt it probable that until the power was firmly in the hands of one strong man the future line of Soviet policy would not clearly manifest itself. We also assumed that the new regime would start off with the foreign and domestic policies established by Stalin - including the outward expression of unremitting hostility to the West.

Recent Soviet moves belie many of these predictions.

The new regime has moved quickly and erratically on two fronts - on the international front with a peace offensive and on the internal front with an amnesty, a repudiation of the doctors' plot concocted by the Stalin regime, a re-reorganization of party and government machinery, and a scrapping of the worship of Stalin in official and propaganda pronouncements.

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On the international front there have been these steps by the Communist front:

(1) Acceptance of UN proposal for the exchange of sick and wounded in Korea.

(2) ^{Limited} acceptance of the principle of voluntary repatriation of POWs (delivered 4 days after Chou En-lai's return from Moscow).

(3) Proposal for discussion of disarmament and atomic controls.

(4) Initiation of 4 power discussions regarding air safety in the Berlin air corridor.

(5) Release of French and British internees in Korea.

(6) Toning down of anti-Western propaganda attacks and its replacement by stressing the possibility of co-existence.

(7) Agreement on a UN Secretary General.

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(8) Relaxation of Berlin traffic controls ~~and~~
~~social fraternization at almost all points where there~~
~~is contact.~~

(9) Soviet initiative ^{for} and social fraternization at
almost all points throughout the world where there is
contact between Communist officials and the West.

A Soviet peace offensive has always been considered
a possibility but this one came sooner than anticipated
and it has been pushed with ^{unexpected} ~~a~~ remarkable vigor. It
constitutes a clear departure from the recent tactics
of the Stalin regime.

WHAT ARE THE PROBABLE OBJECTIVES TO THE SOVIET OF SUCH A PEACE OFFENSIVE

(1) To lessen the danger to the Soviet of general
war now.

(2) To gain a breathing spell for the new Regime.

(3) To stop American rearmament.

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(4) To defeat EDC.

(5) To prepare the way for new proposals on the neutralization and unification of Germany and Japan, to prevent their rearmament and force the withdrawal of American troops from Europe and Asia.

(6) To strengthen the Communist parties in France and Italy for the coming elections.

All our estimates have been unanimously in the view that the Soviet have ~~shown~~ no desire to provoke or become involved in a general war at this time. They are not ready with sufficient atomic weapons or adequate means for delivering such weapons. Also they recognize their present industrial inferiority to the West.

The one area where the Soviets may fear that events could lead them into war is in the Korean theatre. They have already seen a stiffening of our own Far Eastern policy and recognize the possibility that the Korean war, if continued, might be enlarged to the Chinese theatre.

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Then the Soviets might have to face the alternative of deserting ^{their} ~~its~~ Chinese ally or direct intervention which might lead ~~into~~ to war. An armistice in Korea would postpone this danger.

Presumably the Soviet leaders view American, and NATO rearmament, American air bases, and a vigorous American foreign policy as a growing threat. They propose to try to reduce this threat by ending the Korean war and by creating problems for us in Europe. At the same time the new Moscow regime ^{would} get a breathing spell.

Hence a peace offensive is easily explainable within the framework of the flexible tactics ~~with~~ which Soviet policy is so familiar.

Soviet moves in the internal field are far more difficult to rationalize.

Stalin's program for firmly installing Malenkov as his successor and ^{for} carrying on the Stalinist policy seems to have backfired and it may be premature to assume that the succession problem is finally solved. ^{Here is} ~~no~~ support ~~this they point out~~

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(1) The governmental machinery established by Stalin at the Party Congress in October has been scrapped.

(2) Malenkov has resigned as Party Secretary - and thus given up a position of real power.

(3) Neither the dead Stalin nor Malenkov are advertised in Soviet broadcasts - the stress is on the Party.

(4) Malenkov has ~~neither signed a decree~~, issued ^{no} ~~any~~ ^{nor} statements ^{or} appeared in public since March 15 - the day after he was retired as Party Secretary. [^]
~~Significantly he did not sign the amnesty decree.~~

(5) Finally the Stalin-Malenkov concocted doctors' plot has been repudiated, with the remarkable admission that there was no legal basis whatever for the charges and that confessions were obtained by unpermissible methods of investigation forbidden by Soviet law --

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language strong enough to raise doubts, even in the Soviet Union and satellites, regarding all the purge trials of the past decades. Our Embassy in Moscow comments: "Doubts may arise as to the stability of a government in which such fantastic reversals take place."

On the basis of these facts some experts believe that the old Bolsheviks, Molotov, Bulganin, Krushchev, possibly in alliance with the Army, may be moving into a position to take over the real leadership. It took ten years after Lenin's death for Stalin to become firmly entrenched in power. It would be remarkable if Malenkov could accomplish it over night.

When Lenin died, Stalin and Trotsky vied with each other to avoid the honor of making the first great public policy declaration. The man who did it was later liquidated.

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Of course there are ~~many~~ more sensational rumors - that Stalin, who displayed signs of instability in his speech at the October Party Congress, was liquidated by the second set of doctors, installed by Malenkov.

~~All~~ this is pure speculation.

From the point of view of the policy makers the following is about all that existing intelligence justifies:

- (1) It is too early to assume that the succession problem has been finally solved.
- (2) An abrupt change in Soviet tactics, comparable only to that in 1939, may be impending.
- (3) There are deep and unresolved inner tensions which may affect Soviet foreign policy.
- (4) Soviet leaders may well desire a breathing spell on the international front in order to consolidate their positions at home and control over the satellites.

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(5) Finally, while there is no ^{ground} ~~basis~~ toward The West for assuming any change in basic Soviet policy, ^A They have demonstrated the capacity for great flexibility of tactics. Stalin's death faced them with a new emergency. They are adopting new techniques to meet it.

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